

This is an official

CDC Health Advisory

December 5, 2003, 16:43 EST (04:43 PM EST)

CDC Assessing Influenza Vaccine Supplies

An influenza vaccine manufacturer is being quoted as saying it expects to run out of its flu vaccine "very soon." At this time of year, it is typical for influenza vaccine supplies to become less available. CDC is working with manufacturers, state health departments, medical professionals and others to assess the current flu vaccine supply and to identify where available supplies are located.

Following is the information statement being released to the press by CDC:

CDC Assessing Influenza Vaccine Now In Supply Pipeline

High risk individuals and health care workers should be immunized

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in response to strong consumer demand for influenza vaccine is working with vaccine manufacturers, state health departments, medical professionals, and others to assess the status of the current flu vaccine supply in the United States. Current reports indicate that most available flu vaccine supplies have now been distributed to doctors, clinics, health departments and other providers, which is not unusual for this time of year.

"This year it appears that many more people than in recent years received a flu shot during October and November, and unlike other years, there is high interest in obtaining flu shots into December. The fact that so many Americans have acted on the recommendation to receive a flu shot is encouraging," said Dr. Julie Gerberding, CDC director.

"CDC is doing everything possible to assess the availability of flu vaccine to identify any locations that have supplies that may be able to be made available to locations that need vaccine," Gerberding said. "Some states have plans in place to redistribute vaccine supplies should that be needed."

In a typical year, 70-75 million Americans receive a flu shot. This year manufacturers produced approximately 83 million doses of flu vaccine. The United States has never used more than 80 million doses of flu vaccine in a season. CDC officials note that it is not unusual at this time of year for influenza vaccine supplies to be limited as many health care providers begin to wind down their vaccination programs. Therefore, people wishing to be vaccinated may need to be persistent to find vaccine.

CDC has observed an earlier onset of the flu this year; therefore the agency continues to encourage individuals at high risk for complications from influenza and health care workers to receive a flu vaccination, while supplies remain available.

High-risk individuals who should be vaccinated against influenza include:

- persons 50 years and older;
- residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities that house persons of any age who have long-term illnesses;
- persons 6 months of age and older who have chronic heart or lung conditions, including asthma;
- persons 6 months of age and older who need regular medical care or had to be in a hospital because of metabolic diseases (like diabetes), chronic kidney disease, or weakened immune system (including immune system problems caused by medicine or by infection with HIV/AIDS);
- children and teenagers 6 months to 18 years who are on long-term aspirin therapy and therefore could develop Reye syndrome after the flu; and
- women who will be more than 3 months pregnant during the flu season.

In addition, CDC recommends the following groups of people be vaccinated to prevent spreading flu to individuals at high risk of complications from flu:

- doctors, nurses, and other employees in hospitals and doctors' offices, including emergency response workers;
- employees of nursing homes and long-term care facilities who have contact with patients or residents;
- employees of assisted living and other residences for people in high-risk groups;
- people who provide home care to those in high-risk groups; and
- household members (including children) of people in high-risk groups.

Children aged 6 to 23 months, and caregivers of children younger than 6 months, are also encouraged to receive flu shots because children younger than 24 months may be at higher risk for complications from influenza.

For healthy persons ages 5 to 49 the new nasal flu vaccine mist is another option of protection for the flu season. Other, simple steps available to everyone can also protect against flu. Frequently washing hands and avoiding touching the nose, eyes, and mouth will help people avoid transmitting or getting the flu or other respiratory infections, like a cold.

"Flu is very unpredictable. It is not uncommon for seasons to be quite different in their timing. We still don't know how this season will progress. It is too early to tell if the high level of activity that some parts of the country are experiencing will continue throughout our flu season," said Dr. Keiji Fukuda, a CDC medical epidemiologist specializing in influenza.

For more information about influenza and steps to protect individuals and families, visit www.cdc.gov.